

THE WHITE HOUSE

Washington

TOP SECRET

April 24, 1961

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MEMORANDUM TO: The Secretary of State
The Secretary of Defense
Director of Central Intelligence

FROM: W. W. Rostow

SUBJECT: Notes on Cuba Policy.

Herewith, as promised, some notes on a possible approach to the problem of Cuba. You may wish to consider these tentative notions as you develop your own views in coming days.

1. The Approach. The line of approach suggested has these two characteristics:

a. it would deal separately with each of the five separate threatening dimensions of the problem represented by Castro.

b. it would deal with these problems in ways consistent with -- and, if possible -- reinforcing to our world-wide commitments and, especially, to our relations with other Latin American states.

2. The Five Threats. The argument begins by identifying these five threats to us represented by the Castro regime.

a. it might join with the USSR in setting up an offensive air or missile base.

b. it might build up sufficient conventional military strength to trigger an arms race in the hemisphere and threaten the independence of other Latin American nations.

c. it might develop its covert subversive network in ways which would threaten other Latin American nations from within.

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d. its ideological contours are/moral and political offense to us; and we are committed, by one means or another, to remove that offense, including our commitment to the Cuban refugees among us.

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BY JWYm NARS. DATE 4/15/81

e. its ideological contours and success may tend to inflame disruptive forces in the rest of Latin America, accentuating existing economic, social, and political tensions which we, in any case, confront.

Notes on possible lines of action towards each follow.

3. The Threat of an Offensive Base. Following the opening in Khrushchev's latest note, Thompson should be instructed, at an early but cooler moment, to tell Gromyko: we note with satisfaction the Soviet commitment to forego an offensive base in Cuba; that, in line with the President's speech to the newspaper publishers, this is one of the minimum conditions for world stability. A further action on this threat is noted in paragraph 4, below.

4. The Threat of an Arms Build-up. An OAS meeting should be called soon, but after careful diplomatic preparation. The objective would be to achieve common assertion of the following propositions:

a. The constructive tasks of this Hemisphere -- symbolized by the Alliance for Progress -- are such that we cannot afford to divert excessive resources to arms, picking up here from the proposal of Alessandri for hemispheric arms limitation.

b. We are not prepared to see extra-hemispheric military forces emplaced in the Western Hemisphere.

On the basis of such declarations, the OAS would immediately mount arrangements for: hemispheric arms limitation; cooperative military arrangements to cope with any military extension of Castro's power; a demand that Castro accept arms limitation appropriate to the size of his country, under the common rules of the game; an assertion that the hemisphere will jointly act to prevent the creation of a foreign military base or other form of intrusion into the hemisphere.

If Castro failed to play, we would move towards a selective OAS blockade of Cuba, designed to prevent arms shipments to him by sea, if not by air.

5. The Threat of the Castro and Other Communist Networks.

Quite independent of the OAS actions suggested under 4, above, we should begin to build up knowledge of the Communist network and to develop common counter-measures.

will be able to work with us seriously to the extent that the effort is not made an overt political issue. Moreover, this is mainly a professional, not a political, job.

6. The Ideological Threat of the Castro Regime Itself. Here the first step is to make a fresh analysis, on the basis of all the rich intelligence available to us, of the vulnerabilities of the Castro regime. This involves two things. First, a detailed assessment of the Cuban order of battle; of Castro's control mechanism; of attitudes of key individuals at strategic points in the regime; of class and regional attitudes towards the regime and recent and foreseeable trends in those attitudes. We need a map of the cohesive forces and tensions within the Castro system. Second, we require a systematic analysis of various alternative means of exploiting in our interest the weaknesses of the regime that lie within our present capabilities or capabilities that might be developed.

In any case, it is essential that we think again before acting in the old grooves.

7. The Threat of Castroism in Other Latin American States.

The roots of Castroism lie in Latin American poverty, social inequality, and that form of xenophobic nationalism which goes with a prior history of inferiority on the world scene. The vulnerability of the Latin American populations to this form of appeal will depend on the pace of economic growth; the pace at which social inequality is reduced; and the pace at which the other Latin American nations move towards what they regard as dignified partnership with the U.S. What is required here is a radical acceleration and raising of sights in the programs being launched within the Alliance for Progress.

8. A Contingency Plan. We do not know what Castro's policy towards the U.S. will be; nor do we know what Soviet policy towards Cuba will be.

A fully developed contingency plan is evidently required.

9. The Ottawa Speech. If we can develop and agree a new line of approach to the Cuban problem in coming days, one possible occasion for suggesting some of its elements might be the President's address in Ottawa, scheduled (I believe) for 17 May. This would be particularly appropriate if we propose to induce Canada to join in the OAS. Other occasions, however, could easily be found; and it is, of course, essential that we make various soundings in the Hemisphere before committing ourselves to this course, notably those outlined under paragraphs 4 and 5.

10. A Final Point. In two of the four areas where we inherited Communist enclaves of power in the Free World on January 20, we have, initially, not done terribly well. Laos, at best, will yield in the short run a muddy and weak Free World position; in Cuba our first effort at a solution failed. There is building up a sense of frustration and a perception that we are up against a game we can't handle. This frustration and simple anger could lead us to do unwise things or exert scarce national effort and resources in directions which would yield no significant results, while diverting us from our real problems. There is one area where success against Communist techniques is conceivable and where success is desperately required in the Free World interest. That area is Viet-Nam. A maximum effort -- military, economic, political, and diplomatic -- is required there; and it is required urgently.

It is not simple or automatic that we can divert anxieties, frustrations, and anger focussed on a place 90 miles off our shores to a place 7,000 miles away. On the other hand, I believe that the acute domestic tension over Cuba can be eased in the short run if we can get the OAS to move with us along the lines suggested here; and a clean-cut success in Viet-Nam would do much to hold the line in Asia while permitting us -- and the world -- to learn how to deal with indirect aggression.

In the end -- given our kind of society -- we must learn to deal overtly with major forms of covert Communist aggression. And we must teach the Free World how to do it. The combination of the suggested approaches to Cuba and Viet-Nam could help.